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ABSTRACT

This document focuses on curriculum development in Alberta as perceived by the people who are most directly responsible for curricular tasks--teachers and administrators. A total of 27 individuals were interviewed about their perceptions of a three-year plan for development and implementation of curricula in the Edmonton Public Schools. Discussed were the subjective and political factors influencing curriculum development, such as teacher involvement and professional development needs. The paper concludes that the subjective comments that surfaced are often seen as factors to be controlled by evaluation and accountability procedures or to be circumvented with teacher-proof curricula. It recommends that a radical reinterpretation of curricula would place the subjective factors at the center where a development model could evolve. (Author/LD)

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Curriculum in Alberta: A Study of Perceptions

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Occasional Paper No. 7

Department of Secondary Education
Faculty of Education The University of Alberta

CURRICULUM, MEDIA & INSTRUCTION

EA 012 384

To Our Reader:

This paper is part of the Department of Secondary Education's CMI Publication Series. It is an occasional paper, and as such we invite you to focus on a dimension of the field of CURRICULUM, MEDIA AND INSTRUCTION. It is also an informal paper and as such it is meant to allow the author to bring to the reader thoughts at some moment of development, from an early exploratory moment to a later more refined moment.

The series hopefully will consist of papers "occasionally" printed as relevant papers come our way. We see them as conversation pieces - "thought-works" that might engage readers and, possibly on occasions author and reader, to come together in a face-to-face "talk-talk".

Thus, we recognize the papers as being essentially incomplete, rooted in the idea that collaborations cannot be exhausted by an actual paper nor any actual reader. We ask you, our reader to collaborate by using the papers to grasp the reason for the essential incompleteness, that is, we ask you to grasp the conception of analysis which makes the papers possible. We ask you this because we feel that these papers themselves, although they have to be used to make the point, are never the point.

The point is, as far as we are concerned, in collaborative dialogue.

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CURRICULUM IN ALBERTA: A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS*

Kim Krawchenko
Pat Paradis
Bill Sommerfeld

What is the present state of curriculum development in the province of Alberta? In our attempt to tell the tale of current developments a number of alternative methodological and substantive approaches had to be considered. One could, for example, focus on the nature of the curricular product with the intention of identifying apparent trends or innovations in the areas of stated goals, types of content, structures, extent of standardization and so on. This assumes that curriculum, as refracted in the classrooms of the province, and as determining the particular educational experiences of the students, can be identified in terms of documents, guides, material -- in short, products. Another approach might be a kind of systems analysis, focussing on the formal aspects of the development process, including channels of communication, models of decision-making, inputs and outputs, costs and efficiency. Within such a framework our data would take the form of flow charts, lists of projects, statements of objectives, time lines, distribution of personnel and resources, etc.

Such actuarial data are not uninteresting. But what presents a problem is the question of where to draw a line between what is and what is not significant and revealing about the state of curriculum work in Alberta. Gathering actuarial data also poses a problem of definition, requiring a formalistic interpretation of what counts and what does not count as curriculum development. Such an interpretation inevitably would be a

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*This small interview study was undertaken by Kim Krawchenko, Pat Paradis, and Bill Sommerfeld, as final class project for Ed. Cl. 549, an introductory graduate curriculum course, taught by Dr. Max van Manen, who provided assistance in the various stages of the project.

gloss for a much richer and more dynamic educational reality. Curriculum is, in the end, what people act out on the basis of their own understandings, and at this level there exists a whole underworld of process which are not captured by data of the factual sort. It is one thing to learn what intentions are expressed on paper, mandated to committees and wrapped up in a curricular package, and quite another to hear the perceptions of the people who are and who are not involved in the process about how policy is acted out, how and why curricular change is or is not enacted in the classroom, what shortcomings they perceive in the development process, and in what terms they describe and react to current trends. We felt that if such impressions and interpretations could be collected and portrayed in some way, they might provide some stimulating insights into the lived reality of curriculum making. An example will help to make our case here.

There exists within the Edmonton Public School Board a comprehensive and systematic documented plan for the development and implementation of curricula over a three year period. Its purpose is to provide an orderly, rational and consistent set of objectives for the development and implementation of the numerous and diverse projects underway in all subject areas in the entire system - Elementary, Junior High and Senior High School. The following picture emerges from a study of this document: curricular change in each subject area appears to be purposeful, clearly directed and rationally scheduled; at any given grade level teachers will find that according to this plan they will not have to cope with

implementing a half-dozen new programs at once; the plan is useful for budgeting purposes; feedback from the piloting or implementation of a program at one grade level will be available while development at the next grade level is taking place; implementation plans are an integral part of the plan: specific scheduling of professional development activities is included and comprises the largest section of the document; cooperation with other school boards, particularly Calgary, is an interesting feature of some of the projects. So here we have a certain picture of what is taking place, and within its own terms of reference we have no reason to suppose that it is a false picture. The factual data suggests that curriculum development is proceeding in the Edmonton Public School Board in all subject areas, is carefully controlled and organized, sensitive to feedback, accountable to a schedule, responsive to teacher needs in the implementation phase, etc.

However, when we probed people for their perceptions on these very same questions[1] we found as we shall see in a moment, that a different sort of picture emerged. Furthermore, we found that problematical areas were

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[1] The interviews were conducted whenever possible when two or three authors of this report were present. The data were gathered by written record or tape-recorder. The interviews lasted one hour on the average and always were structured loosely around the following guiding questions: "What do you feel are significant examples of recent curriculum developments in Alberta"? "Why do you consider this significant or important enough to mention?" (and questions particular to the interviewees position). The interviews were conducted in a manner designed to "engage" the interviewee in the sharing of sometimes personal views, frustrations, convictions, and so on. Only when the interview became thus engaged, did we feel that the data collected would reflect our methodological intent. The accumulated data were subsequently transcribed, typed and perused for "revealing perceptions". Some data which were judged to be too delicate, too personal, or potentially embarrassing to the interviewee were deleted from our initial draft. Because of the candid nature of some responses an attempt was made to keep the identity of the interviewees anonymous.

identified which did not even surface for consideration when analyzing the formal development plan. We interviewed a total of twenty-seven individuals, most of whom are responsible for setting major directions for curriculum development and policy: seven at the Department of Education (Curriculum Branch, Planning and Research, Field Services), eight at the Edmonton and Calgary Public and Separate School Boards (Program Directors, Associate Superintendents, and individuals in charge of the department of Research and Evaluation and the department of Pupil Assessment), six teachers in Edmonton and Calgary at each school level, a principal, and officials in charge of the Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Project, a trustee-chairman, a Deputy Minister and four faculty members from the University of Alberta. The following kaleidoscope of comments capsulizes the kinds of concerns expressed by these people, which ought to be measured against the assumptions and intentions of the Three Year Plan:

... the system of ad hoc committees, subject area policy committees and the Curriculum Coordinating Committee is very cumbersome and grossly inefficient. Too often decisions are based on sketchy information and inadequate pilot studies ...

(School Board Subject Area Supervisor)

... Witness five years and forty-two meetings to approve a chemistry curriculum, unaccountable delays with the elementary science program (last authorization 1969), and no progress with the compulsory health program (last authorization 1964!) ...

(School Board Subject Area Supervisor)

There must be more long term planning. We can't afford to operate from year to year anymore; it causes too much change and confusion.

(Curriculum Director, School Board)

There has never been any money spent on implementation, and there won't be this time.

(University Faculty member)

You are asked to change your whole approach, even your whole philosophy in this area (social studies) without any help at all. The inservices, if you find out about them, are held after school. It's not a very serious approach ...

(Teacher)

The problem is with the model we use ... the highly structured, hierarchial committee system model, the notion that a committee can make up a master plan, and then that master plan is fed out to the districts.

(University Faculty member)

Even though the curriculum expresses the broad goals, it's a commercial product that gets into the hands of the teacher. She teaches the commercial product.

(Department of Education Subject Area Supervisor)

These comments take us beyond the Plan. They begin to reveal for us the problems of mediation between the "documented" curriculum and the living one. The subjectivity of those who mediate at each level is often seen as a factor which must be controlled by various evaluation and

accountability procedures, or circumvented with such devices as the teacher-proof curriculum or just ignored. But perhaps, in a radical re-interpretation of curriculum we should place the subjective factor squarely at the centre of our probings and conceptions, predicate our development model on this centrality, and acknowledge a whole new set of tasks in the process. This suggestion is based on the well-worn insight by W.I. Thomas that whatever people define as real is real in its practical consequences. The curriculum identified in official documents, material, and system flow charts suggests a certain unity and rationality which is absent in the multiple definitions of the real world of curriculum as enacted by educators at the various levels of the educational enterprise. It seems to us therefore that the most significant educational variation exists at the level of praxis: where curriculum perceptions and actions have their concrete pedagogic and didactic consequences.

Curricular Realities in Alberta

The subjective variations of curricular realities may be best portrayed in the tension created by contrasting the perceptions, gained in the interviews, against the background of two recent enterprises by the Curriculum Branch of the Department (Ministry) of Education: First, the release of a policy document and the current draft of a white paper. Secondly, MACOSA, the Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement.

A government discussion paper,"Alberta Education and Diploma Requirements", was produced and published in 1978 which made several recommendations for educational responsibilities to what schools can do; making selected

subject areas mandatory; increasing the prescriptiveness of course content and the specificity of objectives; placing more emphasis on the development of skills and practical competencies; and reducing the number of course options. Its chief author, Dr. Jake Harder, advocates the adoption of a systems approach to curriculum development, a mastery learning approach to instruction, and periodic system-wide competency tests to ascertain the achievement of set standards. The "Harder Report" has been both hailed and severely condemned by the various constituents of the educational community. It is uncertain whether, and to what extent, the Curriculum Branch of Alberta Education has retreated from this managerial systems approach to curriculum determination. Currently, a separate committee, chaired by Dr. G. Torgenrud, the Director of Curriculum, has been charged with the responsibility of summarizing the responses to the Harder Report and beginning the task of drafting a "White Paper" of recommended policy changes and formulations to be submitted to the Minister of Education.

MACOSA was created in 1977 by the Alberta Government to report on the standards and quality of province-wide achievement in major subject areas: Math, Science, English, Language Arts, and Social Studies. A second aim was to "establish benchmarks", a set of comparative data against which future achievement data can be referenced. The school testing conducted by MACOSA focusses almost totally on cognitive measures (Social Studies is an exception). Originally planned to be published in November 1978, the results of MACOSA are now deferred for reporting to April 1979 (possibly in connection with upcoming provincial elections expected to be scheduled early in Spring 1979). Very few of our interviewees mentioned

the Harder Report or MACOSA in response to our probings of their perceptions of significant curriculum events in Alberta. This one stands out:

MACOSA sits within the Research Branch of the Alberta Department of Education. Curriculum development sits in the Curriculum Branch. There is nothing wrong with setting them up separately, but the important thing is to hook the two together . . . what kind of connections are there? Even prior to that, there is an underlying assumption that these things could be nicely separated, and that is one way to think about the relationship between curriculum development and curriculum evaluation. Another way to think about it is that they cannot be separated . . . that the very first thought of curriculum development in itself is an evaluative act. So in that sense, I prefer to think of the two as being so interrelated, that we cannot divorce the two. One of the things I kept on asking is 'Why are they conducting this assessment?' If they say 'To revise the program, to improve the program', that gives me an entry to hook up with the Curriculum Branch: to find out what <u>they</u> want improved, would have to be considered also . . . how can a curriculum revision or improvement group get help from the assessment people? . . . this is a critical issue. However if MACOSA is primarily a political thing, to satisfy the parents, and to let the public know that the Ministry is on top of the teachers . . . to ensure that certain things are happening, that the kids are learning certain things . . . if that is the major thing, then they know that there is no need to hook up with the Curriculum Branch.

(University Faculty Member)

But it is in the context of what gave rise to the Harder Report, the

White Paper and MACOSA that the multiple definitions of the reality of curriculum should be interpreted. The point, of course, is not whether these perceptions are objectively true, but rather that they are believed to be so by the key individuals who hold them. In terms of the general direction of curriculum in the province, a picture emerges from the overwhelming majority of interviewees suggesting concern with the perceived mood of conservatism, greater prescriptiveness, greater stress on content, more control, evaluation and accountability. This assessment is offered variously with satisfaction, skepticism and hostility:

I am very concerned about the back-to-basics push, with the move to general prescriptiveness, mastery learning, the prospect of system-wide exams, to the extent that they close off the community from identifying its issues and necessary skills. A curriculum can be constantly expanding or it can be prescriptive and closing, drawing tight horizons on knowledge. And it is particularly the tight horizons that troubles me. They all seem to be saying 'Control, control, control . . .'

(Teacher)

"Evaluation is over-emphasized. Those who live by the numbers shall die by the numbers ... I think ultimately evaluation is killing us. Somehow, the feeling that the hoops have to be the same height in every place just poses education in terms of jumping through hoops and making sure standards are the same."

(Teacher)

An accreditation policy is needed by all of the school boards to rectify

the abysmal current process of arriving at grades. Province-wide standards are needed. The current situation is ludicrous.

(Dept. of Ed. Director of Field Services)

We must begin to gather data on procedures - the process of education. We should be evaluating this in a systematic fashion and in terms of the outcomes of what these procedures produce.

(Dept. of Ed. Evaluation Supervisor).

We need standardization because we can't document what is going on out there.

(Dept. of Ed. Head of Planning & Research)

Education right now has gone rather evaluation mad ... The great emphasis on testing is definitely a North American phenomenon.

(School Board Director of Evaluation)

The teacher should write down a statement of what he or she feels are his goals, his perceptions of the goals the prinicpal has for him, and a list of the things he feels he needs from the principal to help him in achieving his goals. The principal can then sit down with the teacher and let him know if his goals and expectations are too minimal or whether they are up to par.

(Dept. of Ed. Director of Field Services)

They seem to have such faith in the psychometricians ... the solution to all our ills ...

(Trustee)

(The new French curriculum is) ... more closely tied up with accountability.

(University Faculty member)

In the new social studies program there will be more structure, more compulsory units per grade, and less optional time ... the political forces in the province are opposed to the issues approach.

(University Faculty member)

The current movement, which is part of the back-to-basics faith, to go back to a text-book approach in the social studies ... this bothers me. What is happening is that in attempting to deal with a perceived problem, another is being created.

(Dept. of Ed. Subject Area Supervisor).

Right now what's happening is we are under terrific pressure to prove that dollar for dollar we are coming across with the goods. There are some pressure groups, including trustees, who are demanding more in modern languages, even though there is some evidence of a growing back-lash in this town.

(School Board Director of Pupil Assessment)

Along with these observations about the general climate in curriculum, there recur implicit and explicit perceptions which point to "political forces" as the source of the trends, backed up by much talk about "public pressure", "feedback", and the notion of a groundswell of discontent which represents a mandate from the grassroots to bring the province's

education system back to the acceptable and measurable standards of the past. This would amount to a rationale for policy (re)formulation which deserves closer scrutiny.

On the formal level the important question about policy is what mandate has given rise to it. As in all provinces, the lines of mandate would seem to be implicit in the institutional structures of the administrative system — from the governmental level to the classroom level. In this context again, a rational picture emerges, that is: government derives its mandate from public (dis)satisfactions with the real and ideal quality of educational experiences of children, and this includes input from professionals and various educational constituents. This mandate leads to the (re)formulation of policy guidelines which are submitted to the minister by the Department of Education. These guidelines in turn form the mandate for school systems to work out the details of the development process: planning, development, implementation, evaluation. The final teacher mandate of how the pedagogy is realized in the school and classrooms derives from both the local curriculum policies of the school systems and to an extent from some sort of acknowledged mandate inherent in the pedagogic responsibility of the individual teacher. The role of the faculties of education and the professional teachers' organization (ATA) within this framework is understood to be an advisory one.

This line of mandating from government policy to classroom policy presents itself as a taken-for-granted rationality, typically expressed as below:

Popular demand initiates new curriculum. In this way, curriculum is

closely tied to political circumstance. The quality of education is the responsibility of the electorate.

(Dept. of Ed. Assoc. Director of Curriculum)

My perception is that curriculum change comes from people... who are in politically sensitive positions who feel they have to respond to what they think people are thinking.

(Teacher)

You don't have a 'public', you have 'publics'. If you don't listen to these publics, you will probably lose the next election.

(Deputy minister)

Ultimately the trustees are the main movers in requiring evaluations in order to create curriculum changes.

(School Board Curriculum Supervisor)

The mechanisms by which this public sentiment is made known to the Minister and the staff of the Department of Education were seldom specified by the people we interviewed. There were references to 'elections every four years', discussions, phone calls, newspaper editorials, letters of complaint and other incidental inputs, all of which occur outside of the formal structures within which input from the various constituents might be expected to be channeled. Beneath the apparent coherence and rationality implicit in the taken-for-granted mandating process we find that certain tension is generated which derives from the observation of many participants in the curriculum development process that input from the public in the political sense carries more

weight than the structured input of the representatives of the various constituents expressed through the committees and school boards:

There is no general survey of parents, community, etc. Parents just phone the trustees or the superintendant. This feedback is the evaluation (of existing curricula). Then there is a board motion saying 'You shall', and you don't argue with the trustees or you'll have to look for another job.

(School Board Director of Pupil Assessment)

I see a perceived sort of pressure on school boards. I say 'perceived' because the pressure is not really from Joe Citizen, since Joe Citizen is often pretty bewildered about the schools. And very often where teachers and parents are able to make a breakthrough, the concerns the individual parents have are not the concerns the public supposedly has.

(Teacher)

The development of curriculum has become too political. The Legislature has recently passed a document called the Goals of Education, and it has created two advisory committees, the sixteen member Curriculum Policies Board and the Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement (MACOSA). The Curriculum Policies Board's membership is one-half nominated with the approval of the government. This opens up the whole question of ideological control over the curriculum ...

(Dept. of Ed. Assoc. Director of Curriculum)

What is interesting about this last allegation concerning ideological

control is not whether or not it could be conclusively demonstrated to be true, but whether or not it has any credibility among broad layers of the educational constituents. For as we have pointed out, beliefs about reality will have 'real' effects. In this regard we found that not only do many people perceive a political inspiration to lie behind recent policy developments, but this is explicitly acknowledged by those who should know. A top official of the Department of Education stated:

What we must acknowledge is that education and politics are inseparable, now more than ever before. . . We are into a new continuum in decision-making. . . thoroughly political. . . we (educators) may very well find ourselves on the outside looking in. . . we may be entering the "age of the disabling professional". . . (the political aspect) is no longer just an interfacing, what we have now is an actual realization of politics (in curriculum).

The explicit politicization of curriculum policy-making is evidenced by a number of recent concrete developments in Alberta. A case in point is the creation of the Curriculum Policies Board (consisting of sixteen members drawn from the various constituents of the province). The implicit function of the Board is to bring mandate and curriculum policy in closer alignment; this in accord with the overall philosophy of Alberta Education:

The structure used is a network of levels of decision-making based on the premise that those with legitimate interests should have a voice

when significant decisions are made.[2]

The "significant" decisions which have been made by the Board were specified in a government circular as follows:

Increased specificity and sequencing of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, primarily in a mandatory core. . . Communications of that mandatory core to the public. . . regard for the scope and sequence across a complete phase of basic education. . . periodic achievement testing, with regional norming. . . support for inservice commensurate with teacher needs. . .[3]

Here we have the realization of very concrete policies which are to be interpreted as a response to the mandate of the electorate. We have no way of knowing whether there is a fidelity between the articulation of public interest which reaches the Board from the Minister's office and the articulation of interests represented on the Board itself, but a spokesperson for the Board told us that "There has been dissension", and that the minutes of Board meetings are not available for that reason.

Mistrust of the representative nature of the Board was articulated by several interviewees (significantly the majority did not mention the Board when discussing curriculum policy); and a spokesperson at the

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[2/3] Curriculum Development for Alberta Education, and Curriculum Decision-Making in Alberta : Structures, Processes and Issues. Prepared by the Curriculum Branch of Alberta Education 1977/1978.

Department of Education lent credence to this by stating:

The Minister (Julian Koziak, Minister of Education) alone chooses the six members representing the public at large. Who gets appointed depends a great deal on political leanings and affiliations. The first group chosen were handpicked by Lougheed and Koziak. . . There's no doubt about it, it's really political.

I think people are unaware of the political implications of who the Curriculum Policies Board Members are. The Board is the overseeing body for everything now, and will not allow anyone to implement anything without its approval.

In speaking of the content of the recent policies, the spokesperson identified the public mandate as the source of these:

There is no doubt about the fact that the Board is being prescriptive - that is definitely the trend right now. It is a reaction to the demand by the general public for more core, back to the basics, and all that.

Under the Curriculum Policies Board are the Subject Coordinating Committees, whose mandates involve defining areas of responsibility and general objectives in the subject area, producing materials, recommending resources, as well as "assessing individual and societal needs with respect to the subject area". Despite an apparent autonomy with their defined areas, it seems that the committees are in some informal way influenced in advance by the Board, through the communication of certain expected norms. It was

reported that:

Two members of one (subject matter curriculum coordinating) committee resigned because of political pressure to move in a certain direction.

(Dept. of Ed. Associate Director of Curriculum)

Another source reported that:

The influence of the Curriculum Policies Board was always felt in our deliberations (during the Subject Matter Coordinating Committee meetings). There was a constant pressure of second-guessing the "mind" of the Curriculum Policies Board. Progressive suggestions and proposals frequently were rejected or compromised because it was felt that "the Curriculum Policies Board will never let it pass".

(Subject Matter Curriculum Coordinating Committee member)

And ironically, from the point of view of an interviewed member of the Curriculum Policies Board the perceived policy making function appeared less than satisfying:

I went on the Policies Board hoping we could initiate policy, but that is not what happened. A pile-up of curriculum was left over from the previous curriculum board and we had to approve it all. We still aren't caught up, and it's all quite frustrating.

(Curriculum Policies Board member).

Few would deny that curriculum in its hidden and ideological manifestations is through-and-through political. But as suggested above the political

extensions have become much more overt, and are manifestly evident not only on the level of curriculum policy and guideline development (with respect to curriculum content) but also in the very arena of curriculum resources production. The most ambitious endeavor is undoubtedly the Alberta Heritage Resources Project.

It was initiated from the Cabinet. There were stringent timelines attached to this. Staff was hired in January, 1978. (Dr. Nixon, the appointed head of the project) originally started working on it in November 1977 with one typist. . . we have developed our own process model which has never been done before. Also, we have undertaken to handle the entire job, the entire production process, by contracts with printers, binders, curriculum development teams, etc.

(The purpose of the Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Project is) to provide additional learning resources for the teachers, to enhance and fill in gaps in the curriculum. . . The Premier felt some Heritage project ought to be in education. He wrote a note to the Director of Curriculum, which was, in fact, the action which initiated the project. He included specific ideas as to what he wanted, which were deemed impractical by the Curriculum Branch. . . There are to be over 1,000,000 books in schools by Christmas 1979. Publishers told the project people this couldn't be done in the time frame set down. Note here that the publishers felt that the project may cut into their area - they felt they could do a better job since they had the organization and the expertise.

(Heritage Learning Resources spokesperson)

A visible sign, to the people of Alberta, of government involvement in curriculum was a full page ad in the daily newspapers announcing that:

The Government of Alberta provided $8.3 million from the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund to create the Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Project.

The Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Project is a positive long-term asset, a gift from the land to the people of Alberta.

(Edmonton Journal, January 30, 1979)

The Government of Alberta is reportedly spending $32,000 on publicizing this major effort in curriculum materials development. The political presence of the government in the curriculum process is evident also in the severely limited government imposed timelines in the production of the materials. On the elevenths hour CBC news broadcast (in which Education Minister Koziak was pictured amidst the first available copies of the materials) this was openly interpreted as a move to have the publications of the materials coincide conveniently with the nearing provincial elections. While 8.3 (now 8.8) million dollars are spent in a maddening rush, the majority of teachers (until January 30th) knew nothing about the existence or the nature of the project. Some of those who did, wondered how this curriculum will meet the challenges of evaluation and implementation concerns. This is how the challenges were perceived by interviewees inside and outside the Heritage Learning Resources project:

We are preparing these materials on the basis that teachers do not have

sufficient background data. The teacher guides are being created to accompany all the materials. Objectives, background data, questions (levelled from literal to applicative areas) are all included, plus many of them include specific lesson plans and suggested activities. With these guides, teachers will not have to do curriculum preparation. . . Right now our job is getting it out there and implemented; later we will evaluate implementation by spot checks. We will have to report to Cabinet about implementation.

(Heritage Learning Resources Spokesperson)

If they were really going to spend eight million dollars on something that was going to make a difference in the classroom, they would spend it more on people than on things.

(School Board Curriculum Director)

What I have to say about this project is the same as I have to say about any mandated curriculum program from the Department of Education and that involves implementation. We have told the Department of Education as coldly as we possibly can "no money no funny". We have told them, if you feel you can bring in say a new language arts program then supply the funds necessary, if not forget it. Sure we'll "buy" the materials, we have to, however, we can't guarantee that teachers will or will be able to integrate, assimilate, and facilitate use of the new materials. How are we going to be held accountable for the success or failure of this process? The Department of Education doesn't have the resources to check to see if we are accountable. They could implement a system of exams and then you can think of all kinds of ways to get around that anyway.

(School Board Supervisor)

Some of that stuff (the materials) is super-excellent, like the natural history slides. And some of it is super-stupid in my view. These plaster maps are going to clutter up schools. In concept they are not bad. Any creative teacher could do a lot with one of those maps. But I am talking about a seventy-five pound map! To put a seventy-five pound map in an elementary school! The kids can't move it, half the teachers can't move it, and the principal's first problem is where to put it. And where he puts it will decide its use. Ninety-five percent will either hang it on a wall or put it in such a position that it cannot be used. If it is not worked on, its curriculum value is nil . . . I would have thought of different ways of spending that money (over one million dollars).

(School Board Curriculum Director)

The (Heritage Learning Resources) material will be shipped out to schools and much will remain on the shelves, unused or poorly utilized . . . a thorough study of the entire education process in Alberta should be undertaken before any new curriculum directons or innovations should be initiated. New directions are being set without systematic evaluation being done to determine where there are shortcoming.

(School Principal)

In a more general context too it appears that problems of implementation and professional development are at the center of many of the expressed frustrations of those chiefly responsible for the success of curricular change. An awareness of the pivotal importance of implementation as the sine qua non of the curriculum development process was acutely and pervasively expressed by our interviewees. And yet, we did not hear

any insights or proposals which challenged in some fundamental way the existing conceptualizations of how curriculum is ultimately enacted. Where reference was made to innovative change, implementation problems, evaluation, or professional development needs, these issues were always conceptualized in terms which are the counterposition of a radical stance on the subjective factor. Where troubles were defined they were defined in instrumental terms, and the proposed solutions were instrumental solutions — detailing the need for "delivery systems", reallocation of funds, more teacher time, resources, needed skills for curriculum writing teams, and increased inservice contact with innovative or experimental curriculum materials.

The Department of Education mandates programs categorically, but refuses to put money into the inservice programs necessary. This is the biggest problem in implementing new programs . . . The education budget system has its priorities backwards. Money is allocated based on running the schools -- caretaking, teacher salaries, basic materials, etc. If any money is left over it is used for professional development or curriculum development. The curriculum situation in the province is dismal because of this structure of priorities.

(School Board Director of Curriculum)

Money has to be spent upgrading teachers, keeping them dynamic, motivated, providing the inservices necessary, curriculum development, professional development. However, this isn't a priority item for school districts, putting money into brick and mortar. No money is apportioned to upgrade staff, in fact if money is to be cut it is in this area because you don't notice any obvious decline in program.

(School Board Supervisor of Professional Development)

Teachers should be trained through inservices before they write curriculum. Then these people could be used as a core group of resource personnel . This training and involvement of teachers should be part of an ongoing curriculum development process.

(School Board Ass. Supt. of Curriculum)

There's nowhere that a teacher can go and see the Revised Program being successfully taught. They don't have demonstration centers, there is no plan to make sure that every social studies teacher in the province is even aware that there is a new program. There is just no money being spent. . . What's done will be volunteered by the A.T.A. Social Studies Council, and the consultants from the department. But there is no systematic method.

(Teacher)

Implementation is often ignored. Alberta Education should provide adequate funding for implementation once a new program is authorized. To date authorization includes only the approval of texts with no provision for teacher inservice or workshops and lately new programs are being approved with little thought for the problems faced by the classroom teacher. Larger systems might be able to look after themselves but the problems faced by smaller jurisdictions are enormous. Perhaps part of the difficulty lies in the organization of Alberta Education. The Curriculum Branch (program authorization) is divorced from the Field Services Branch (program implementation).

(Dept. of Ed. Subject Area Supervisor)

Alberta is a wasteland when it comes to inservicing. Teachers need more release time if the proper amount of inservicing with regard to curriculum development is to be carried out. However, Boards do not provide this release time and are unwilling to provide it . . . Problems with administration - the local boards and the A.T.A. presents problems both time and financial in allowing proper inservicing of teachers.

(School Board Program Supervisor)

I don't see enough thought going into the implementation and upgrading of curriculum packages. All they see is packages and you have to work on the teachers sensibilities and capabilities; the package is nothing less, nothing more than a package. A good teacher can take the lousiest package in the world and teach a superb course. Programs do not solve the problem at all.

(Teacher)

The teachers want a cookbook. "I think that's natural when they want you to teach split grades and all the other things".

(Teacher)

The above examples show that there exists a general understanding which locates the decisive challenge for curriculum at the point where teacher subjectivities enter irrevocably upon the scene; but what we might say about the limited conceptual framework colouring these perceptions can now be spelled out by way of implications for curriculum work in Alberta.

Implications

Two themes seem to have emerged from this small-scale study — themes which point toward an absence of awareness of two kinds of curricular dimensions: the subjective factor and the political factor.

The approach taken in this report forced us to articulate the idea of the subjective factor, as we were focussing less on the formal and "documented" aspects of recent curriculum development and more on how the people who are most directly responsible for curricular tasks assign personal meaning to it. But as we scanned the perceptions for revealing descriptions we became more and more impressed by the idea that the absence of the subjective factor could be seen as a tell-tale of a certain blindness to the "personal" element in the pedagogic enactment of curriculum. What is more, this blindness seems to be shared by both administrators and the teachers we interviewed. We noted only one or two exceptions to this blindness:

... I think they rely on the wrong model in implementation. It is very much like the RDDA (Research, development, diffusion and adoption). Now what is typical about this model? There is a linear formula here. So following that kind of a notion one develops curriculum and then you implement it. And the use of that kind of a model has a tendency to suggest to the evaluators that they should be asking of the recipients of the program (the teachers) how faithful are they to the master plan. So even from the outset you are looking for deficiencies. You are looking for things out there not being up to snuff. This is the idea already set. It always precludes the possibility that things out here might be better

than in the initial plan.

(University Faculty member)

We suggested earlier that "in a radical reinterpretation of curriculum we should place the subjective factor squarely at the center of our probings and conceptions, predicate our development model on this centrality and acknowledge a whole new set of tasks in the process." Thus, in perusing the perceptions gained through our interviews, we had to engage in some "negative" seeing of our own: we thought that we could almost see the interviewees struggle with the shortcomings of the traditionalist, means-ends, input-output model of curriculum. We could see this in the repeated emphasis on teacher involvement and professional development needs and the awareness that no curriculum makes a difference which does not directly affect the teacher and the child. But this budding awareness of a radical reinterpretation of the subjective factor was severely arrested in managerial systems talk, or at best in the still formal abstractions of language associated with such terms as teacher "role change", or inservicing new "teaching strategies".

The other absent factor in Alberta curriculum development is political awareness. We have seen that the political body in Alberta has now extended its influence into the very content of curriculum policy-making and even into the production of material curriculum resources. This perceived shift of the politicians' involvement in education and curriculum decision-making raises all kinds of issues relating to mandate and policy-making and to the position of the professional

educators in this process. Curriculum should probably be recognized as a thoroughly political enterprise and yet this recognition seems to be largely absent among Alberta educators, including the professional organizations such as the ATA and indeed the body of university-based educators. The professional body of teachers in Alberta seems to feel that politics and curriculum can and should be separated in the interest of "professionalism". Of course, there are those who believe that the hidden curriculum and the very process of education inserts a political bias into anything we teach and fail to teach to children in schools. Other educators may believe that such views reflect an unnecessary conspiratorial attitude of distrust toward the basic values of society.

This interview study seems to show, however, that now the political presence in curriculum is so manifestly evident, that a 'conspiratorial' critique of ideology becomes superfluous. It would seem then, that the absence of awareness of the political factor is evident in two ways: some perceive government to be invading the area of curriculum policy determination and they may fight to resist this invasion; others choose to be blind to the political extension and, therefore, do not put up a fight. The latter see curriculum development still as some sort of politically neutral process. The point however, is that both groups of educators are impervious to the point that curriculum is political in its very essence. Both impose a false dichotomy which sees the political outside of curriculum and professionalism on the inside.

Finally, we recall the earlier suggestion that the subjective factor and the political factor are inseparable dimensions at the level of praxis: "where curriculum perceptions and actions have their concrete pedagogic and didactic consequences". The challenge to curriculum is to uncover the various tasks posed by this praxis.